

PRESS RELEASE

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Conyers Expresses Concern Over Homeland Security Proposal

Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee issues the following statement at today's hearing on the proposal to create the Department of Homeland Security:

"There is not one person in this Congress who does not agree that we need better coordination between federal agencies in order to fight the threat of terrorism. I applaud the President for coming around to the realization that structural changes need to be made to make this happen.

While this proposal certainly is the product of good intentions, I believe the verdict is still out on whether it will make for good government.

Does it approach this problem with a chainsaw or a scalpel? Will there be a disruption in our homeland defenses as a result of the relocation of scores of law enforcement officers? Most importantly, we need to know whether it will make us any safer.

I have several concerns with the proposal, which I hope Governor Ridge will spend some time addressing.

First and foremost, a nation of immigrants should not establish an immigration apparatus designed principally to clamp down on immigration. We must strive to remember that immigration does not equal terrorism. Immigrants are our neighbors, our employees, and our fellow church members.

The INS has long been plagued with problems. Simply subsuming the immigration functions into a new larger department – without instituting essential reforms – will not improve the security of our country. We need an immigration agency, wherever it is located, that can effectively and fairly secure our borders.

Second, the proposal does nothing to reform or reorganize the two most critical elements of our security apparatus – the FBI and the CIA. Creating a new agency with no authority over our intelligence agencies ignores a key element of the problem.

Third, despite Governor Ridge and the President's claim to the contrary, I cannot see how this proposal could possibly be "budget neutral." The proposal combines over 20 federal agencies and consolidates 170,000 federal employees. Transition costs alone likely could be well north of \$1Billion.

Fourth, it is essential that the new Department respect and protect the rights of the hardworking federal employees whose work is so vital to its success. In particular, existing collective bargaining contracts must be preserved in any reorganization.

Finally, I am concerned that the Department's lack of accountability threatens our nation's history as an open government. For example, the FOIA disclosure, public input, privacy and whistleblower protections that cover most other federal agencies are either severely weakened or non-existent.

We cannot repeat the mistakes of past government reorganizations. The reorganization before us today raises substantial questions."